

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Below is the entire set of pending claims pursuant to 37 C.F.R §1.121(c)(3)(i), with any mark-ups showing the changes made by the present Amendment.

1. (Currently Amended) A plug fastener adapted to connect a picket to a second article such as a rail, the picket having an opening on at least one end, comprising:

a first engaging surface having an outermost ~~maximum~~ diameter adapted to frictionally engage an interior surface of the opening in the picket; and

a mating surface having an outer diameter adapted to ~~mate~~ frictionally engage with an interior surface of the second article, the frictional engagement of the first engaging surface and the mating surface sufficient to connect the picket to the second article.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Currently amended) The plug fastener of claim 12 wherein said fastener is adapted to ~~affix~~ connect the picket at least one of an acute angle and a right angle to said second article.

4. (Cancelled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 1 wherein said first engaging surface has cross-sectional shape selected from the group consisting of rectangular, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal and other regular polygons having at least four sides.

7. (Previously presented) The plug fastener of claim 1 wherein said first engaging surface includes a plurality of ridges adapted to frictionally engage the opening in the picket.

8. (Currently amended) The plug fastener of claim 7 wherein said first engaging surface has a shape selected from the group consisting of cylindrical, ellipsoidal, conical, elliptic conical frustum, pyramidal frustum, and ball.

9. (Cancelled)

10. (Canceled)

11. (Previously presented) The plug fastener of claim 10 wherein said mating surface includes a plurality of ridges adapted to frictionally engage the opening in the second article.

12. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 10 wherein said mating surface includes a plurality of threads adapted to engage the opening in the second article.

13. (Previously presented) The plug fastener of claim 10 wherein said mating surface has a shape selected from the group consisting of cylindrical, ellipsoidal, conical, elliptic conical frustum, pyramidal frustum, and ball.

14. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 8 wherein said mating surface is flat, whereby said fastener is adapted to be affixed to a flat surface of said second article.

15. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 14 further comprising affixing means including at least one selected from the group consisting of bolthead, aperture having a regular polygonal cross-section, protrusion having regular polygonal cross-section, and countersink.

16. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 14 wherein the fastener is adapted to be hidden from view after the picket is fastened to the second article therewith.

17. (Withdrawn) A plug fastener adapted to engage a longitudinally oriented opening of a picket for attaching the picket at a right angle to a second article such as a rail, said plug fastener comprising:

a cylindrical member provided with a first engaging surface for engaging an interior surface of a first one of the picket and the second article; and

a second member connected to the cylindrical member at an opposing end, the second member provided with a second engaging surface for engaging an interior surface of a second one of the picket and the second article,

such that said plug fastener is adapted to be hidden from view after the picket is fastened to the second article therewith.

18. (Withdrawn) A method of affixing a picket or a plurality of pickets at least one of a right angle and an acute angle to a first rail and to a second rail to form a railing, comprising:

- a) engaging an interior surface of a longitudinally oriented opening of a first end of a picket with a first plug fastener having a first engaging surface;
- b) affixing a mating surface of the first plug fastener to a corresponding surface of a first rail;
- c) engaging an interior surface of a longitudinally oriented opening of a second end of the picket with a second plug fastener having a first engaging surface; and
- d) affixing a mating surface of the second fastener to a corresponding surface of a second rail,

such that the picket is affixed to the first and second rails by the first and second fasteners and the first and second fasteners are thereafter hidden from view.

19-20. (Cancelled)

21. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 18 wherein said first engaging surface has shape selected from cylindrical, ellipsoidal, conical, elliptic conical frustum, pyramidal frustum, and ball and other shapes having cross-sections of rectangular, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal and other regular polygons having at least four sides.

22. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 21 wherein the first engaging surface includes a plurality of ridges adapted to frictionally engage the longitudinal opening in the picket.

23. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 22 wherein the mating surface is flat such that said plug fastener mates with a flat surface of said first and second rails.

24. (Withdrawn) A method of affixing a plurality of pickets at an angle to a first rail and to a second rail to form a railing, comprising:

- a) engaging an interior surface of a longitudinally oriented opening of a first end of a picket with a first plug fastener having a first engaging surface;
 - b) affixing a mating surface of the first plug fastener to a corresponding surface of a first rail;
 - c) engaging an interior surface of a longitudinally oriented opening of a second end of the picket with a second plug fastener having a first engaging surface;
 - d) affixing a mating surface of the second plug fastener to a corresponding surface of a second rail; and
 - e) performing steps a) through d) for each of the plurality of pickets,
- such that the plurality of pickets are affixed to the first and second rails by a plurality of each of the first and second plug fasteners and the first and second plug fasteners are thereafter hidden from view.

25. (Withdrawn) A railing or fences including a plurality of pickets affixed at an angle on a first end to a first rail and on a second end to a second rail, each of the plurality of pickets being affixed to the first and the second rails by a method comprising:

a) engaging an interior surface of a longitudinally oriented opening of a first end of a picket with a first plug fastener having a first engaging surface;

b) affixing a mating surface of the first plug fastener to a corresponding surface of a first rail;

c) engaging an interior surface of a longitudinally oriented opening of a second end of the picket with a second plug fastener having a first engaging surface; and

d) affixing a mating surface of the second plug fastener to a corresponding surface of a second rail.

26. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 18 wherein said steps are performed in the order a), c), b) and then d).

27. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 18 wherein said steps are performed in the order b), d), a) and then c).

28. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 18 further comprising forming an opening in said first and second rails, wherein the mating surfaces of the first and second plug fasteners are affixed by engaging with interior surfaces within the openings in the first and second rails.

29. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 1 wherein said mating surface is a flat surface that is adapted to lie flat on a flat surface of a second article.

30. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 29 further comprising an at least partially arcuate body on which said first engaging surface is disposed.

31. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 30 wherein said body comprises a generally barrel shape.

32. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 29 further comprising a longitudinal opening from a top end of said plug fastener to a bottom end of said plug fastener, said longitudinal opening adapted to receive an elongate fastener to connect said plug fastener to a second article.

33. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 29 further comprising a shaped body on which said first engaging surface is disposed, said shaped body permitting a snug fit into the interior surface of an opening in the picket.

34. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 29 wherein said first engaging surface includes a plurality of ridges to assist in creating a rigid fit within the opening in the picket.

35. (Withdrawn) Railing or fencing components, comprising:

- a) a top rail;
- b) a bottom rail;

c) plug fasteners; and

d) pickets, each having a top end and a bottom end, and recesses in each of said top and bottom ends, each said recess being sized to receive a plug fastener of said plug fasteners.

36. (Withdrawn) The railing components of claim 35 wherein said plug fasteners each have a picket end and a rail end, said picket end being sized to fit snugly into said recesses of said pickets.

37. (Withdrawn) The railing components of claim 36 wherein said rails have rail recesses and said rail ends of said plug fasteners are sized to fit into said rail recesses.

38. (Withdrawn) The railing components of claim 25 wherein said rails have flat surfaces, and said plug fasteners have at least one end having a flat surface adapted to contact said flat surfaces of said rails.

39. (Withdrawn) The railing components of claim 38 wherein said plug fastener is at least partially arcuate.

40. (Withdrawn) The railing components of claim 35 wherein said plug fastener has flat surfaces at two ends and an arcuate portion disposed between said two flat surfaces.

41. (Withdrawn) The railing components of claim 35 wherein said plug fastener includes two ends and a longitudinal opening therebetween, the opening being adapted to receive an elongate fastener to affix the plug fastener to said top rail or said bottom rail.

42. (Withdrawn) The railing components of claim 41 wherein the plug fastener has a flat surface at two ends and a shaped body therebetween, the shaped body permitting a snug fit into the recess in the end of the picket.

43. (Withdrawn) The railing components of claim 42 wherein the plug fastener includes on the shaped body an affixation assisting surface to assist in creating a rigid fit within the recess in the pickets.

44. (Withdrawn) The railing components of claim 43 wherein said affixation assisting surface includes a plurality of ridges.

45. (Withdrawn) The railing components of claim 42 wherein said shaped body is at least partially arcuate.

46. (Withdrawn) A railing or fencing kit, comprising:

- a) pickets, each having a top end and a bottom end, and recesses in each of said top and bottom ends, each said recess being sized to receive a plug fastener; and
- b) plug fasteners adapted for connecting the pickets with rails that are disposed at either end of the pickets.

47. (Withdrawn) The railing kit of claim 46 wherein the plug fasteners are at least partially arcuate.

48. (Withdrawn) The railing kit of claim 47 wherein the plug fasteners include a longitudinal opening adapted to receive an elongate fastener.